

Leon Corzine

National Corn Growers Association

House Committee on Agriculture  
June 26, 2002

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Stenholm, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Leon Corzine and I serve on the Board of Directors for the National Corn Growers Association and Chair NCGA's Biotechnology Working Group. I farm at Assumption, Illinois where my son and I raise corn and soybeans. It is my privilege to be here today on behalf of the National Corn Growers Association, the National Association of Wheat Growers, the American Soybean Association, the U.S. Rice Producers Association, the U.S. Rice Producers Group, and the Rice Millers Association.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer our views on legislation proposed by the Administration to create a new Department of Homeland Security, which would be accomplished, in part, by transferring the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the newly proposed Department of Homeland Security.

I would like to begin by pointing out the critical role APHIS currently plays not only in assisting to preserve America's plant and animal resources from agricultural pests and diseases, but, perhaps most importantly in our view, ensuring that America's agricultural exports, currently worth over \$50 billion annually, are protected from unjustified trade restrictions. It accomplishes this through the timely issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary certificates of export. This assures the importing nation that our agricultural exports will not jeopardize their food supply.

For example, karnal bunt is a pathogen currently afflicting a very minor portion of our wheat crop. But to meet the requirements of importing nations, APHIS issues certificates with a guarantee that our exports are free of karnal bunt. And APHIS has placed a high priority on working to have karnal bunt deregulated, thus not subject to quarantine, worldwide. We must be assured this work remains a high priority.

Secondly, the responsibility APHIS currently has in regulating the movement, importation, and field testing of biotech crops through their permitting and notification procedures is of critical importance to future food production. As you know, the science of biotechnology has already benefited farmers through improved production practices and reduced tillage. Many new biotech crops will reduce the use of costly inputs and scarce resources; advances that will greatly improve the environment and provide

alternatives to improve profitability for U.S. producers. There are literally hundreds of plant-derived biologics in the pipeline that benefit all of society. Development and commercialization of these new and exciting biotech products require extremely rigorous and regulatory oversight by APHIS, FDA, and EPA. Agriculture must have direct access to these agencies to facilitate this process.

Our organizations have been pleased by the attention and priority the Department of Agriculture has given to ensure the efficiency of the APHIS biotech regulatory function. In fact, just last week USDA Undersecretary of Marketing, Regulatory Programs Bill Hawks and APHIS Administrator Bobby Accord announced a sweeping reorganization of this division. This reorganization, locating Biotechnology Regulatory Services within the Office of the Deputy Administrator for APHIS, recognizes and elevates the importance of agricultural biotechnology to agriculture and food production. We applaud this move. It expands the capacity of APHIS to match rapid advances in technology and provides APHIS with the capability to offer assistance to other nations in their efforts to regulate biotech crops on the basis of sound science and practical realities.

Which brings us to the business at hand, moving APHIS out of an agricultural setting and into a homeland security setting.

Our associations stand firmly behind the President as he conducts the war on terrorism. And we want to assist in helping to create the most effective Department of Homeland Security possible. Our concern is that uprooting APHIS lock, stock and barrel from USDA will impair the current functions of APHIS, particularly in the areas of trade assistance and the oversight of agricultural biotechnology development. The transfer in our view would risk the current focus on these critical issues at a very important time. For the above reasons, unless these concerns are more fully addressed, we have serious concerns regarding such a move.

However, in the interest of providing some constructive input, I would suggest that the Committee examine the following:

The current mission of APHIS is to;

- 1) Safeguard resources from exotic invasive pests and diseases,
- 2) Monitor and manage agricultural pests and diseases existing in the US,
- 3) Resolving and manage trade issues related to animal and plant health, and
- 4) Ensure the humane care and treatment of animals.

How does that mission match up with the stated mission of the proposed Department of Homeland Security, which is to;

- 1) Prevent against terrorist attacks

- 2) Reduce the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism; and
- 3) Minimize the damage, and assist in the recovery, from terrorist attacks that do occur within the United States.

Where the functions between the two organizations would facilitate better communications and seem compatible, then move forward and limit the transfer to those functions.

We acknowledge that there are sectors of agriculture that are very vulnerable to unwarranted contamination by disease or pests and we need to protect our agricultural production and be vigilant in maintaining a safe, secure agricultural system for the U.S.

However, we urge caution in moving either the trade support functions or the agriculture biotechnology oversight functions. Both of these functions are highly dependent on the free exchange of information and technology both within the United States and internationally. Transparency is essential for strengthening and sustaining the public's confidence in the biotechnology arena.

In fact, APHIS carries out their trade support activities in accordance with the World Trade Organization Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement). The SPS Agreement "...requires signatory countries to adhere to certain basic concepts in setting their animal and plant health import requirements, including the SPS Agreement concepts of transparency, harmonization, equivalence, risk assessment, and regionalization."

The last thing that an organization devoted to fighting terrorism would, or **should**, want is transparency or information sharing generally. In fact, I understand that the concern over the release of information is one reason the Administration is seeking an exemption from the Freedom of Information Act for the Department of Homeland Security.

Finally, we have been informed of assurances that APHIS would continue to operate in the new Department of Homeland Security in the same manner that it currently operates within USDA and that it would maintain the same relationships and ties that it currently has with other agencies and Departments including those within USDA. This leads to the question of what organizational advantages would be derived from the transfer of APHIS?

Again, if the Committee decides to approve the move of all, or certain functions, of APHIS to the new Department of Homeland Security, we would strongly encourage the Committee to add language stating that nothing in the Homeland Security legislation be construed as amending or repealing the current legislative authorities, trade agreements or treaties that APHIS operates under. I've attached most of those authorities as an addendum to my testimony. Let me assure this Committee that whatever action is taken

by the Congress on this matter, you can be sure that we are ready to do our level best to make the transition as effective as possible.

Again, I want to thank the Committee for this opportunity to present our views and I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.